

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-12

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FM AMEMBASSY RABAT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1739

INFO AMEMBASSY MADRID

AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

AMEMBASSY TUNIS

USINT ALGIERS

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PGOVT PINT MO

SUBJ: MOROCCO'S NEW CABINET: ACCENT ON RESHUFFLE

REF: RABAT 1788

1. SUMMARY: NEW MOROCCAN CABINET DOES NOT REPRESENT CHANGE IN POLICY. RATHER, IT IS A REFLECTION OF KING'S TACTIC OF MOVEMENT FOR MOVEMENT'S SAKE AND OF PUTTING HIGH GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS INTO POTENTIALLY COMPETITIVE POSITIONS, THEREBY ASSURING THAT NO ONE OF THEM BECOMES TOO STRONG. THUS, THOUGH OSMAN STILL PRIME MINISTER, HE PRESIDES OVER CABINET WHICH INCLUDES TWO EX-PRIME MINISTERS, CONTRARY TO EXPECTATIONS OF SOME, THERE HAS BEEN NO QUOTE OPENING UNQUOTE TO POLITICAL PARTIES. MOST HOPEFUL NOTES ARE THAT ECONOMIC TEAM HAS BEEN STRENGTHENED AND THAT DR. MOHAMED BENHIMA, WHO HAS BEEN EFFECTIVE MINISTER, HAS

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RETAINED COOPERATION PORTFOLIO, LESS ENCOURAGING IS REPLACEMENT

OF FOREIGN MINISTER BENHIMA BY FORMER PRIME MINISTER LARAKI.
END SUMMARY.

2. IN CABINET CHANGES ANNOUNCED APRIL 25 (REFTEL NOTAL), ACCENT IS DEFINITELY ON RESHUFFLE, NOT ON A MAJOR CHANGE. PRIME MINISTER OSMAN REMAINS IN PLACE AT HEAD OF EXPANDED CABINET WHICH NOW HAS R THIRTY MEMBERS, AND FIRST THIRTEEN MINISTERS ON PROTOCOLARY LIST ARE VERY MUCH QUOTE OLD BOYS UNQUOTE. (ONLY TWO NOT IN PREVIOUS CABINET ARE FORMER PRIME MINISTER LARAKI, WHO HAS BEEN NAMED FOREIGN MINISTER FOR SECOND TIME IN HIS CAREER, AND JUSTICE MINISTER ABBES KAISSI, WHO HAD BEEN DIRECTOR OF ROYAL CABINET.) TWO OTHER MEMBERS OF CABINET ARE ALSO HOLDOVERS AND TWO MORE HAD PREVIOUS MINISTERIAL EXPERIENCE.

3. AMONG OLD BOYS, THE TWO MAJOR FIGURES ARE CLEARLY LARAKI AND DR. MOHAMED BENHIMA, ALSO AN EX-PRIME MINISTER. RELATIONS BETWEEN TWO HAVE NOT BEEN GOOD IN PAST. WHEN BENHIMA WAS PRIME MINISTER, LARAKI WAS HIS FOREIGN MINISTER, AND IN 1969 BENHIMA CHARACTERIZED LARAKI TO OUR AMBASSADOR AS QUOTE THAT BOY IN THE FOREIGN MINISTRY UNQUOTE. LARAKI SUCCEEDED BENHIMA AS PRIME MINISTER LATER THAT YEAR AND HELD POSITION UNTIL AFTER SKHIRAT COUP ATTEMPT IN 1971. HE PRESIDED OVER A GOVERNMENT WHOSE CORRUPTION PROMPTED AT LEAST IN PART ARMY OFFICERS' DECISION TO ATTEMPT COUP. OF THE TWO, DR. BENHIMA IS CLEARLY BETTER DISPOSED TO U.S. HE WORKED HARD TO PROMOTE AMERICAN INVESTMENT IN MOROCCO DURING HIS RECENT VISIT TO U.S. AND HAS BEEN BEEN MOST COOPERATIVE WITH EMBASSY AND USAID. LARAKI, ON THE OTHER AHND, WAS OFTEN UNCOOPERATIVE IN HIS DEALINGS WITH US, AT TIMES GIVING IMPRESSION OF NOT BEING INTERESTED IN HIS JOB. HE WAS HIGHLY CRITICAL OF OUR POLICIES IN MIDDLE EAST, NOTABLY AFTER 1967 MIDEAST WAR.

4. A CABINET WHICH INCLUDES TWO EX-PRIME MINISTERS IS ELABORATION OF KING'S TACTIC OF HAVING SEVERAL RIVAL CENTERS OF POWER AT HIGH LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT IN ORDER TO PREVENT ANY ONE MAN FROM BECOMING TOO STRONG. SITUATION NOT AN EASY ONE FOR OSMAN, PARTICULARLY SINCE DR. BENHIMA APPARENTLY DISLIKES HIM. BENHIMA MAY CONSIDER OSMAN TO HAVE MISUNDERSTOOD FORMER'S AMERICAN VISIT AND TO HAVE REPRESENTED IT TO KING AS FAILURE. WE WOULD EXPECT THAT OSMAN, WHOM NO ONE THOUGH WOULD LAST AS LONG AS HE HAS, WILL REMAIN A LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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LESS THAN DYNAMIC PRIME MINISTER.

5. AMONG OTHER OLD BOYS, NEW INFORMATION MINISTER AHMED TAIBI BENHIMA HAS RETAINED STRONG POSITION ALTHOUGH DID NOT LIVE UP TO RUMOR MILL'S RECENT BILLING OF HIM AS POSSIBLE NEXT PRIME MINISTER. HE CAN BE EXPECTED TO PLAY STRONG ROLE IN TRYING TO IMPROVE MOROCCO'S AND THE KING'S PUBLIC IMAGE. OPPOSITION NEWSPAPER EDITORS MAY VIEW HIS APPOINTMENT

WITH SOME ALARM SINCE, WHEN HE WAS ACTING INFORMATION MINISTER, HE SEIZED THEIR JOURNALS AT VERY HIGH RATE. HOWEVER, IT WILL NOT BE DIFFICULT FOR HIM TO BE AN IMPROVEMENT ON HIS PREDECESSOR. THE VERY AMIABLE BUT OFTEN INEFFICIENT HASSAN Z EMMOURI HAS ADDED TOURISM TO HIS FORMER URBANISM, HOUSING, AND ENVIRONMENT PORTFOLIO. APPOINTMENT AS MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE OF SALAH M'ZILY, WHO PRIOR TO SERVING AS MINISTER OF PUBLIC WORKS IN LAS GOVERNMENT HAD SPENT ENTIRE CAREER AS DISTRICT ADMINISTRATOR AND PROVINCIAL GOVERNOR, MAY BE EFFORT TO GIVE DIRECTION OF AGRICULTURE TO SOMEONE WHO KNOWS COUNTRYSIDE WELL. ONE OF MINISTRY'S MAJOR PREOCCUPATIONS IN COMING YEAR WILL BE WHAT TO DO WITH LANDS RECOVERED FROM COLONS IN 1973. NEW FINANCE MINISTER BENSLIMANE (RUMOR MILL HAD HIM LEAVING CABINET) HAS APPARENTLY COME THROUGH BRAIN SURGERY TO TAKE A POSITION MORE IMPORTANT THAN HIS PREVIOUS COMMERCE PORTFOLIO.

6. NEWCOMERS TO CABINET ARE ALMOST ALL YOUNG AND IN MANY INSTANCES TECHNOCRATS. OUTSTANDING AMONG THEM ARE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR THE PLAN BENCHEIKH, WHO SEEMS TO HAVE OVERCOME A REPUTATION FOR BEING TOO LIBERAL POLITICALLY, AND KAMAL REGHAI, SECRETARY OF STATE FOR FINANCE, WHO HAS SERVED PREVIOUSLY AS DIRECTOR OF THE FOREIGN EXCHANGE OFFICE AND BRIEFLY AS MINISTER OF TOURISM. WE WILL FEEL THE LOSS OF MOHAMED MAHJOUBI, WHO LEFT HIS POST AS DIRECTOR OF CABINET AT FOREIGN MINISTRY TO JOIN AHMED TAIBI BENHIMA AS SECRETARY OF STATE FOR INFORMATION. MAHJOUBI WAS A KEY FIGURE IN OUR DAY-TO-DAY DEALINGS WITH GOM.

7. NEW APPOINTEES REFLECTS CERTAIN GOM PRIORITIES IN ECONOMIC AREA. MOHAMED BELKHAYAT CONTINUES AS KEY DECISION MAKER IN PRIME MINISTRY, NOW HAVING TITLE OF SECRETARY OF STATE. NEW POSITION OF SECRETARY OF STATE FOR FINANCE UNDERLINES GOM LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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DESIRE FOR MORE EFFICIENT DEVELOPMENT SPENDING PROCEDURES. NEW SECRETARY OF STATE FOR COMMERCE, INDUSTRY AND MINES IS FORMER MINES DIRECTOR WHO WILL CONCENTRATE ON STEPPED-UP MINERALS PROSPECTING AND EXPLOITATION PROGRAM ANNOUNCED BY KING LAST MONTH.

8. YOUTH AND SPORTS ACTIVITY, FORMERLY IN LABOR AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS MINISTRY, DOES NOT APPEAR IN ANY PORTFOLIO IN NEW CABINET. FOREIGN MINISTRY INFORMS US THAT DESTINY OF THIS PART OF BUREAUCRACY NOT YET DECIDED.

9. SEVEN MEN WERE DROPPED FROM CABINET. THIS CAME AS NO SURPRISE IN CASE OF THREE: GUESSOUS OF FINANCE WHO WAS ILL, AGRICULTURE MINISTER BERRADA WHOM KING HAD VIRTUALLY FIRED IN RECENT SPEECH CRITICAL OF AGRICULTURAL POLICIES, AND

BENJELLOUN, THE INFORMATION MINISTER. FOURTH IS FORMER RELIGIOUS ENDOWMENTS, ISLAMIC AFFAIRS AND CULTURE MINISTER MEKKI MACIRI, WHO WAS WIDELY CONSIDERED INCOMPETENT BUT HIS CREDENTIALS AS ISLAMIC THEOLOGIAN WERE THOUGHT GOOD ENOUGH TO PERMIT HIM TO LAST AWHILE LONGER. HIS REMOVAL MAY MAKE IT POSSIBLE FOR FOREIGN ARCHEOLOGISTS TO RESUME WORK HERE. BECAUSE OF HIS FEAR THAT NATIONAL TREASURES BEING ROBBED, NACIRI HAD STOPPED ALL FOREIGN ARCHEOLOGICAL ACTIVITY PENDING PREPARATION OF NEW LAW GOVERNING SUCH WORK. EX-TOURISM MINISTER EL KOUHEN HAD BEEN VERY ACTIVE IN PALACE-ORIENTED POLITICAL GROUP, CONSTITUTIONAL AND DEMOCRATIC POPULAR MOVEMENT. HE WILL NOW BE FREE TO DEVOTE HIMSELF TO POLITICS FULL TIME IN ANTICIPATION OF NATIONAL ELECTIONS, WHICH HAVE BEEN PREDICTED FOR NEXT FALL OR WINTER.

10. QUOTE OPENING UNQUOTE TO POLITICAL PARTIES, WHICH SOME SOURCES HAD PREDICTED, CERTAINLY DID NOT MATERIALIZE. THERE IS NO ACTIVE REPRESENTATIVE OF ANY POLITICAL GROUP IN CABINET NOW THAT EL KOUHEN IS GONE.

11. CONCLUSION: AT THIS POINT, CANNOT CONSIDER RESHUFFLE AS MUCH MORE THAN JUST THAT, ALTHOUGH STRENGTHENED ECONOMIC TEAM IS HOPEFUL DEVELOPMENT. KING HAS FOLLOWED USUAL TACTIC OF MOVEMENT FOR MOVEMENT'S SAKE. IN PROCESS, SOME YOUNGER OFFICIALS HAVE BEEN REWARDED; A SMALLER NUMBER, GENERALLY OLDER, ARE NOW IN ECLIPSE. PERHAPS MAJORE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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CHANGE IS THAT CABINET NOW LARGER THAN ANY IN RECENT MEMORY. NEUMANN

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